

**-- Senator Jim Jeffords' Dispatch From DC – Volume 1, Issue 1 --**

April 2005

Dear Vermonters,

It is my pleasure to introduce you to the first issue of ***Dispatch From DC***. This “E-Newsletter” contains information on my efforts on behalf of you and other Vermonters and also includes updates on recent developments in the federal government. It is my hope you will find ***Dispatch From DC*** helpful and informative.

It has been a busy start to 2005 on Capitol Hill. From domestic issues to foreign policy matters, I have been working hard to ensure that Vermonters are well represented in the United States Senate. I have continued my efforts to improve our public schools, protect family farms, guarantee our veterans the benefits they deserve, and look after the interests of Vermont on a variety of other issues. I have also been working to bring home federal funding to Vermont for programs and services that are so dearly needed.

If you have any questions about ***Dispatch From DC*** or any other issue, please feel free to email me at [vermont@jeffords.senate.gov](mailto:vermont@jeffords.senate.gov), visit my website at [www.jeffords.senate.gov](http://www.jeffords.senate.gov), or call my office at (800) 835-5500.

Thank you for your support. It is an honor and a privilege to represent and serve you in the nation's capital.

Sincerely,



Senator Jim Jeffords

*Please feel free to forward ***Dispatch From DC*** to any other interested Vermonters.*

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### ***Victory for the environment!***

#### ***My committee rejects President's plan to weaken the Clean Air Act***

On March 9<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, on which I am the ranking member, rejected President Bush's misnamed "Clear Skies" legislation on a bipartisan vote. This legislation would have stopped enforcement of the Clean Air Act, allowed the oldest, dirtiest power plants to increase pollution without installing anti-pollution technology and given power plants an extra 10 years to continue to avoid reducing mercury pollution.

I was proud to work with the first President Bush on the Clean Air Act amendments of 1990. That was an example of what we could do working together, Republicans, Democrats and Independents. Unfortunately, this president is trying to undo his father's legacy.

I stand ready to move forward on legislation to strengthen the current Clean Air Act, but I will fight any attempts to weaken current law. Remember, Vermont and New England are downwind of the power plants in the Ohio Valley that emit harmful pollutants into the air we all breathe.

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#### ***Senate highway bill boosts Vermont funding 37 percent***

I was pleased to shepherd legislation through the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee that will increase Vermont's federal highway funding by 37 percent, totaling more than \$47 million in additional funding each year. As the author of this legislation, I will work hard to move this bill through the Congress this session.

Vermont has 14,056 miles of highways and 2,668 bridges, many of which are in desperate need of repair and improvement. My legislation will provide additional funding for transportation projects throughout Vermont, including the completion of the Missisquoi Bay Bridge, safety improvements along Route 7, the maintenance and repair of interstates 89 and 91, and repairing highways and bridges throughout the state.

We still have a long road ahead on this legislation, but rest assured that I will be fighting to ensure Vermont gets the resources it needs to keep its roads safe and efficient.

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#### ***Investing in Education***

Education is the best investment the federal government can make. As a nation, we have long recognized that the quality of our future depends upon the quality of the education provided to our children. Since 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has provided the foundation for federal efforts to help children succeed in school. I have serious concerns, however, about the lack of funds available to implement federally mandated education programs, particularly those programs that serve vulnerable populations, such as those required by Title I of the ESEA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In addition, I feel strongly that we must provide increased access to higher education, as well as career and technical education. I believe the federal government should provide the necessary funds to ensure that a high-quality education is available to all students. I have fought and will continue to fight for sufficient funding for education.

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### ***Bush's Budget passes the buck to our children and sets wrong priorities***

In 1974, Congress became alarmed at the recurring budget deficits (and the executive branch's tactics to combat them) and passed the Budget Act. The deficit that year was \$6 billion. Last year, the deficit was \$412 billion overall, and if you exclude the Social Security surplus, it was \$567 billion. Such numbers boggle the mind, but to give you some perspective, tax receipts covered only about 70 percent of federal spending last year if you set aside Social Security.

Deficits are not necessarily a bad thing, but imbalances this large are unwise. In the face of a national emergency or economic recession, the federal government should be able to borrow in order to confront a threat or spur an economic recovery. With the economy on the mend the gap between spending and revenues should be closing. Instead, we are looking at record deficits as far as we can reasonably predict. Although President Bush has often said that we should confront problems today rather than kicking them down the road for future generations, his recently submitted budget would actually *widen* the deficit over the next five years by reducing taxes even further.

At the same time, his budget priorities are all wrong. The president's proposal underfunds veterans' health care by nearly \$16 billion over five years and guts programs that are vital to our communities and to our low-income citizens, who would find affordable housing and child care unattainable. The president's budget would also cut billions of dollars from Medicaid, forcing states to foot the bill. This comes as the State of Vermont struggles to fill an \$80 million hole in the current Medicaid program. Put simply, I do not believe the president's budget reflects the priorities of Vermonters or of the nation.

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## ***President's Social Security plan is a dangerous gamble***

The first thing we should do to strengthen Social Security is to get our overall fiscal house in order. As the Baby Boom generation begins to retire, the current Social Security surplus will evaporate, and in two decades or so, Social Security will begin to redeem the Treasury securities it now holds. The government will then face the challenges of simultaneously conducting its regular operations, making good on its promises to the Social Security trust fund and dealing with the even bigger funding problems we face in health care.

President Bush is correct that we need to face these issues squarely. I wish he were equally forthright in his proposed solution. Unfortunately, his only proposal to date is private accounts, which do nothing to resolve Social Security's problems, and will actually aggravate our deficits. As Vice President Cheney noted, setting up private accounts will require additional trillions of dollars in borrowing. Doing so will hasten the day when the Social Security trust fund is exhausted, necessitating benefit cuts even sooner.

President Bush has asked retirees to take on additional risk in providing for their retirement. I disagree. With health care costs climbing all the time, and traditional private pension and retiree health benefits on the decline, we must maintain a strong system of guaranteed Social Security benefits. People of all ages certainly need to save more for their retirement, but they should do so in addition to, and not in lieu of, Social Security.

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## ***Protecting Vermont's family farms***

I will continue to work to protect dairy farmers from market fluctuations and depressed prices beyond their control. In February, I joined with Senator Leahy and a bipartisan group of 27 senators to introduce legislation to extend the Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) Program. MILC has brought more than \$45 million in safety net payments to Vermont in the last three years. This program is vital to our family farms and our entire state.

I firmly believe the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact was the best solution for Vermont dairy farmers. Unfortunately, the compact continues to lack support from the Congress. Meanwhile, I will do all that I can to extend the MILC Program to serve as a substitute.

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## ***Stabilizing Iraq and bringing our troops home***

I have heard from many Vermonters who have offered their thoughts and concerns about the war in Iraq. I vehemently opposed the invasion of Iraq, as I never believed Saddam Hussein posed an imminent threat to the United States. As the second anniversary of the invasion has come and gone with no evidence of weapons of mass destruction, violence still surges in the streets, and the number of U.S. military casualties totals over 1,500. I strongly believe our mission must be focused on training Iraqi military and police so they can take on the job of bringing stability to the newly formed Iraqi government. We must assist the Iraqis as they develop their new constitution and restore the infrastructure that has been destroyed. I am proud of the work our Vermont National Guard is doing in the region and am impressed by the outpouring of support given to them by Vermonters. I am proud that many Vermont towns debated resolutions on the Iraq war, while strongly supporting our soldiers. I firmly believe our troops should be brought home at the earliest possible moment.

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### ***Providing our Veterans with the services and benefits they deserve***

As a veteran and a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, issues concerning veterans are of critical importance to me. I strongly believe the United States has a duty to keep our promise to the men and women who have served this country so bravely. During the recent debate on the president's budget, I worked with a number of Senators in an attempt to increase funding for our veterans, as the president's request was insufficient. I will continue this work at every possible opportunity during the upcoming debate on appropriations bills. I have also cosponsored legislation to allow for concurrent receipt of both retiree and disability benefits, so these deserving veterans can receive all the benefits for which they are eligible.

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